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SUBJECT: RACE, RURAL POVERTY, AND LAND REFORM - BRAZIL'S
IMPOVERISHED QUILOMBOS

REF: A. SAO PAULO 000789

[1](#)B. SAO PAULO 00843

[1](#)C. 03 BRASILIA 3739

[1](#)1. SUMMARY. As it struggles to find resources to implement programs from agrarian land reform to Zero Hunger, the government of Brazil faces another challenge to its busy social agenda in bringing Brazil's quilombos (communities originally founded by fugitive slaves) into the modern world. The task of integrating quilombos into society is difficult because it presents economic, race, and social challenges. Almost half of all Brazilians describe themselves as being of African descent, giving Brazil the second largest Black population in the world behind Nigeria. Afro-Brazilians represent a disproportionate number of the nation's poor. (Brazilian race relations are covered in a series of Mission reports, see Refs A and B.) Quilombo residents tend to be abjectly poor, educated to the fourth grade, and living in communities only tenuously linked to infrastructure grids.

[1](#)2. President Lula's quilombo agenda has made considerable strides in addressing quilombo problems, but much more is needed. Unfortunately, resources restrictions mean that quilombos will not make significant progress in the short-term. On July 10-11, Poloffs visited Kalunga, a quilombo in northern Goias state, 250 rugged miles north of Brasilia. Poloffs found Kalunga to be much like other quilombos: impoverished and without land title. END SUMMARY.

KALUNGA, MUCH THE SAME AS 300 YEARS AGO

[1](#)3. On July 10-11, Poloffs, along with Claudio Braga of the National Institute of Colonization and Agrarian Reform (INCRA), the GOB agency responsible for implementing land reform policies; and Bernedete Lopes of the Palmares Cultural Foundation, the GOB agency charged with registering and protecting quilombos, visited Kalunga. Kalunga is the largest quilombo in Brazil with 4,000 inhabitants spread across three municipalities, occupying over 625,000 acres. The quilombo was founded by escaped slaves from the neighboring state of Minas Gerais who dispersed their communities in remote locations to avoid capture. For almost 300 years, Kalungans lived in cultural and geographical isolation. Contact with the outside world began in the 1980s. Since then, Kalunga has welcomed curious researchers and tourists, including President Lula who visited the quilombo in March 2004.

[1](#)4. Kalunga runs much as it did three centuries ago, with a backward economy based on subsistence agriculture and barter. Not surprisingly, Kalunga is plagued by abject poverty. Basic sanitation, health care, and education are slow in coming. None of the mud huts or brick homes we visited had indoor plumbing. Currently, the Palmares Foundation is developing several sanitation projects in the community. Doctors, visits to the remote quilombo are infrequent and hospitals are largely inaccessible. The purchase of three vans to shuttle patients to neighboring clinics is the most recent improvement in health care. Educational opportunities are limited, as schools in Kalunga go up to only the fourth or fifth grade and classes are overcrowded. In one area, a teacher with only a fifth grade education instructs grades one through four. Few parents can afford to send their children to neighboring cities for further education. The desire for more educational and employment opportunities lures young Kalungans off the quilombo. According to one resident, not one Kalungan youth who has managed to go to university has ever returned to the quilombo.

BRAZIL'S LARGEST QUILOMBO TO GET LAND

[1](#)5. Kalunga will soon gain title to the land it has occupied for centuries. On June 30, the GOB announced that it would transfer land to Kalunga using federal and state funds for indemnification. The announcement came almost five years after Goias state officially recognized Kalunga's authority over the 625,000 acres. The delay in the title process was caused by both structural and financial deficiencies. Although the GOB recognizes quilombo land as sites of national heritage to be protected under the Constitution, only recently has the GOB developed a clear plan and funding to transfer land to quilombos.

THE STATE OF QUILOMBOS

18. Kalunga,s economic and social problems are indicative of quilombos. There are 746 registered quilombos (with hundreds more believed to exist unregistered) with more than 2 million people spread across 24 of Brazil's 26 states. Most of these communities are impoverished and without land title. In March 2004, the Palmares Foundation and the University of Brasilia published results of a joint study on 156 quilombos.

The study showed that the lack of access to basic sanitation, treated water, and health care has led to the spread of diseases. Food security is a major concern, as the agrarian communities are vulnerable to extremes in weather conditions. There are few schools, and those in operation are inadequate. According to the Palmares Foundation, only 150 of the 746 quilombos have schools. The lack of infrastructure is one of the biggest impediments to integrating quilombos into modern society and lifting them from poverty. As in Kalunga, there are few roads connecting quilombos to nearby cities, making travel and commercial exchange difficult. In addition, many quilombos do not have electricity or phone lines.

19. Quilombo land reform has moved slowly. In 1995 the first land title was transferred to a quilombo - seven years after the 1988 Constitution recognized quilombo land rights. To date, only 72 of the 746 quilombos hold land titles.

LULA'S QUILOMBO AGENDA

10. President Lula is a champion of the quilombo cause. Since taking office, he has turned over the administration of quilombo land reform to INCRA, a more experienced agency in land issues than the previous administrator, the Palmares Foundation. (Palmares continues to work in other areas of quilombos.) The transfer of administration allows quilombos to be included in the National Plan for Agrarian Reform, issued by the GOB in November 2003 (Ref C). The GOB has established measurable goals for quilombo land reform. INCRA, with assistance from the Palmares Foundation, is charged with completing thirty land transfers by the end of this year and 120 by the end of Lula's term in 2006. Special training in handling quilombo land issues has recently been provided to INCRA personnel responsible for quilombos. The GOB is also moving to include quilombos in the country's social welfare programs, recently making quilombos an area of priority for the government's Zero Hunger initiative.

LULA'S CHALLENGES

11. The challenge the GOB faces in addressing these issues is resources. There are only three INCRA members in each region of Brazil working on quilombo land reform. The Palmares Foundation has only six people (most of who work from Brasilia) who cover a plethora of quilombo economic and social issues with a meager annual budget of R\$ 1 million (approximately US\$ 333,000). According to INCRA, the dearth of resources and expertise often means that quilombos with major land conflicts or with large populations are serviced first.

12. COMMENT: Quilombos pose another challenge for the GOB in the area of race and poverty. In a country where racial and socioeconomic inequity affects a majority of the population, there are never enough resources. With weak political representation and no economic bargaining power, quilombos have no leverage to affect change in their own communities. As a result, they remain in danger of being prioritized low on the GOB's political agenda, even though President Lula has shown personal interest in helping quilombos, especially in the area of land reform. However, granting land to quilombos is just the beginning. To develop and modernize quilombos will require that the GOB, for years to come, pay special attention to these communities. Public service facilities, utilities, job training, and infrastructure are just a few of the many basics quilombos still lack. END COMMENT.

CHICOLA